

New York Theaters and Their Attractions

Pertinent News of Plays of the Closing Season

Spirit of French Theatrical Art Is Transferred to the American Stage by Such Vivacious and Skillful Actresses as Miss Irene Bordoni.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

PROBABLY it is her long sojourn here during a season that has not been conspicuous always for brilliancy that makes Miss Irene Bordoni seem a necessity to the metropolitan stage. Even when "The French Doll" is a fragrant memory of the theater year Miss Bordoni ought not to think of leaving New York for any protracted period. It is not possible to estimate the esteem in which she is held "on the road." Of course, she ought to be appreciated there and everywhere else, since so much skill and so much charm must hold their sway in any intelligent city. But she really belongs to the New York stage. It alone is metropolitan, and Miss Bordoni is the most metropolitan of actresses. What else could she be with Paris as a home town. Imagine calling Paris a home town!

There so much of the actress's unmistakably Gallic charm, her piquancy and her skill were created. No other actress on the American stage so faithfully transfers to our drama the spirit of French theatrical art. She embodies it in its best estate. She has shown her ability moreover to maintain this high quality under varying conditions. She arose from the crudity of Winter Garden pantomime to revues and then to musical farce before she interpreted with such unique facility and appreciation the heroine of a Sacha Guitry farce. In "Sleeping Partners" she showed how delicately she can play a scene of gossamer comedy. Her couplets as *Mme. de Pompadour* in "As You Were" provided the most distinguished note in a season of musical revue, which is a branch of stage art not distinguished as a rule by artistic distinction. She has the technique of her art at her fingers' ends. Possibly there is an occasional overaccents as one might expect from a stranger to our tongue. But the prevailing qualities of her art in "The French Doll" and in every other role are piquancy, finish and the invariable vivacity of her race. These are traits the New York stage always needs. So Miss Bordoni should be here for at least one more year however sadly she may be missed elsewhere.

The manager who recently revived with some success an English comedy,

English Comedy Is Revived With Some Success.

evidently wishing to add some fillip of novelty to what was so obviously old hat, promised that the original conception of the leading role would be adhered to. In other words, the heroine would be enacted by a young woman rather than by an actress in the years of the finished artist who first presented the play here. This woman happened, by the way, to be one of the really distinguished actresses of the American theater. Naturally such a degree of skill as she possesses did not come over night.

It took time to acquire such a finished and facile control of the medium of her art. So it was with some interest that the actress who succeeded her was awaited by the public. It was merely urged in her behalf that she was just as young as the authors intended she should be and not as mature as the actress who first presented the part.

It was soon seen that this new interpreter of the role was capable only of a kind of acting that is already outmoded. Her skill was of the earliest Billie Burke period, which that skillful artist herself has long since abandoned. But she was boldly announced as just as young as the heroine should be.

Even if youth were there—and it was not necessary even this time to call in the S. P. C. C.—there was so little else that the innate triviality and shallowness of the little play were quite mercilessly revealed. The commanding skill of the original actress in New York, her rare sense of humor and her unflinching technique had given to the piece an appearance of merit which it did not in reality contain. She had in other words proved herself so superior to the work of the dramatist that an altogether fictitious value was bestowed on the play by her high talent and her technical skill. But the other actress was young and that should not be forgotten even if she seemed to make the comedy totter with senile decay.

Mr. O'Neill at Home.

Those admirers of Eugene O'Neill who have felt in the past that he, perhaps, confined his dramatic output too much to the little theater of the Provincetown Players in Macdougall street, are probably beginning to feel that this literary organization is after all the most favorable of his producers. Surely "The Hairy Ape" would never have been subjected to police censorship had the play kept in its original frame. Any dramatist is lucky to have his work on the stage of the Plymouth Theater with the watchful and artistic eye of Arthur Hopkins always on it. But "The Hairy Ape" revealed in its original environment few if any of the traits which attracted the attention of censors, amateur and otherwise, after it had been brought up into the theater zone.

Probably the profanity did more than any other quality to offend theatergoers who made its acquaintance on Mr. Hopkins's stage. It was the incomprehensible iteration of the words as well as the phrases that baffled uptown theatergoers. It will be interesting once the text is available in book form to count the number of times "Christ" is used as an oath. As if there were not enough of this, the cockney guide of the seaman when he takes him to see Fifth avenue, must invoke the name of "Jesus" to make his point. Already the air is growing pretty thick with blasphemy before this note is added. Other words that appear from time to time in the text are less startling, but it will nevertheless be interesting to learn their actual number when the text is in hand.

Now all these characteristics of the play which do so much to repel many theatergoers who would be admirers of the dramatist existed of course when "The Hairy Ape" was first acted south of Washington Square. But they did not for some reason seem

the determining quality of the drama as they do at the Plymouth Theater. In the narrow auditorium, with its suggestion of a kind of theater alumnus, the high artistic achievement of the company, with its limited material means—these combine to prepare the ears of the spectator for a kind of talk different from what the usual play has to give. This is of course excellent preparation for the work of Mr. O'Neill.

Back to Nature.

Montague Glass has done more for his two long lived creations, *Potash and Perlmutter*, in "Partners Again," than he did in any of the plays devoted to them with the exception of the first. They are essentially the creation of business. They are seen in clear outline only against a commercial background. The play at the Selwyn shows what they can accomplish in the popular business of selling automobiles. There may have been minutes of hilarious merriment in "Business Before Pleasure," in which the two were trying their hand at the making of movies. But the effort here was to create fun by showing their reaction to a strange milieu. Of course, this was an artificial condition just in the degree that it departed from what the two men would have done in life. Certainly they never would have been dominating figures in a cinema studio.

Yet there were undeniably funny minutes in their sojourn in those strange surroundings. How much deeper and richer, however, is the humor of "Partners Again." Their mistakes in salesmanship are just as inevitable as their ill luck in picking for their first experiment a car which is reluctant to move at all out of a crawl. "It's fool proof," one of the firm says when recommending the

make to a prospective purchaser, and it is just as characteristic that the other should find encouragement for his desperate partner in the assertion that meat packers get indicted regularly twice a month, but before they are tried "their arteries harden like plumbing." They are back in business as of old, speaking the language they are not understanding but invent.

When Barney Bernard remembers the little *Hattie* who is looking for a post as stenographer it is because she was the girl he had to pay \$325 to have her teeth straightened. Business again, but heart as well. It may be easy to underestimate the skill with which Alexander Carr embodies the more successful and dashing *Maurice* apart from the mere personal achievement of the actor. Yet how much more effective is the acting of his confederate when Mr. Carr is present! He was not with him in two or three evolutions of the kaleidoscope which shook Mr. Bernard into the center of the scene. And those were the plays in which, possibly, our old friend Abe was less impressive.

A Prize Play.

The first of the Greek Theater publications of the University of California is "Wild Birds," a play in three acts by Dan Totheroh, which won the prize competition for which more than eighty works were submitted.

Mr. Totheroh's work has been acted at the University of California and in San Francisco and has succeeded in arousing sufficient interest to prove that it possesses qualities out of the ordinary. It is not easy for even the professional to judge of the qualities of a drama from the printed page. If it were managers would have few, if any, failures. Most plays are read as books might be. The fiction, the

characters, the text, they are judged as if they were to be always on the printed page. But that is unfortunately not the place of their final appraisal.

It is on the stage that they must in the final instance be judged. They are thus placed in an entirely different relation to the spectator. Values must exist which are not suspected on the printed page. The whole work must be viewed in another dimension. Speeches need not be amusing or dramatic in themselves—indeed, it is a matter of indifference whether they are or not—but in their relation to the posture of circumstances on the stage. A speech which may seem pointless to the reader may be full of humor if it is properly posed in connection with the drama, and one that seems lifeless enough on the page may be of moving interest to the listener who hears it spoken as a skillful playwright has placed it in his work.

So there is no real estimate of the play's best qualities from the reading except by a rarely experienced judge. Mr. Totheroh's story of Western life is, however, a vividly human and truthful bit of dramatic writing. It tells the story of two loves so youthful as to make "Wild Birds" almost a children's tragedy. The boy has escaped from a reform school and falls into the grasp of the cruel farmer who helps him to keep away from his pursuers. The girl, who is fatherless and had always been reproached with the fact, is also a slave of the prairie farm. The two are thrown together, two derelicts of humanity on the vast breast of the sea of grass. They love with "the innocent flame of youth" rather than with the wisdom of experience. Their sin is of course discovered. The boy is beaten until he dies under his sufferings, while the girl drowns herself in the black well, which has always so fascinated her as a haven of rest.

IN BROOKLYN THEATERS.

Fanny and Kitty Watson, Williams and Wolfus and Ona Munson will comprise the triple headline bill to be presented this week at the New Brighton Theater by George Robinson, manager. Kitty Doner and William Gaston will share headline honors at the Orpheum. Others will be Bill Bailey and Lynn Cowan, Jim McWilliams and Harriet Mariotte.

Did You Hear?

How Managers Estimate Rent and Why They Let In So Many Funny Shows.

By LUCIEN CLEVES.

THE theatrical season may not have been very brilliant at the outset nor at any time during its progress was it necessary to put on blinders to look at the dazzling plays which managers and playwrights provided for the delight of the public. All of it was just as ordinary as the selection of a prize play suggested. But nobody ever had any conception of the sort of pieces that would come to the stage as the theater year ended.

"At least three of the plays recently acted here at the best theaters are of such a character," a manager told the reporter for *The New York Herald* the other day, "as to make the unfortunate persons who were compelled to witness them hate the theater for the rest of their lives. Managers are of course very short sighted to put such pieces before the public. It may be that the reputation of a theater does not suffer from the character of the plays seen there. The public soon forgets."

"Take a case in point. One of the most attractive theaters in the city was recently empty. A manager wanted to put in a certain play by an unknown author. Three weeks rent was guaranteed. The owner of a large interest in the theater urged the manager to accept the offer. Rent for three weeks was not to be despised. But the manager stood out against his partner. He would not let in the show which was almost certain to fail. Another manager took the case. He ran for three weeks with loss of course to the author who backed it, but not heavily, since the actors were, as they so often now are, playing on the cooperative basis. This other manager estimated their rent on a basis of forty weeks. When that was paid up, everything else was waived. It may amount to. Even \$1,000 is better than nothing. Some of the first class playhouses, now that the season is past, are willing to go along on less. It never was so cheap to give a play. In case of a complete failure,

like the recent plays, nobody loses much. The manager is sure to get something, since his is the first that comes in at the box office. So these season enderers that have been cropping up lately may continue indefinitely.

The New Plays.

Satire is evidently to be the dominating note in the new plays of the approaching season. Henry Miller has just performed during his San Francisco tour "The Awful Truth" by Arthur Richmond. Mr. Richmond is making rapid progress since his first appearance at the Booth Theater three years ago with "Not So Long Ago." Gilbert Miller bought this comedy for the use of Charles Frohman, Inc., and then passed it over to his father. It tells of a divorced couple who continue, after all, to be in love with each other. Eventually they are restored to matrimony and happiness. In his "Young Mrs. Winthrop," Bronson Howard treated the same theme with variation. The play has been so successful in providing a character for Miss Chatterton that it certainly will be seen here next season. Satire on the life of the small town which mimics its big neighbor is the theme of "West of Pittsburgh," which is the latest play by George Kaufman and Marc Connelly to see the light. It has been tried in several towns and opinion has been so far unanimous that it is destined to be the greatest success by the authors of "Dulcy" and "To the Ladies."

Mme. Kutschera Here.

Mme. Elan Kutschera, who has just been found starring in Paris, was in this city until a few months ago. She came here at the outbreak of the war, sans husband in "Abie's Irish Rose." She appeared in a number of the Wagnerian operas and then went to Brussels, where she was married to a restaurateur named de Nys. She sang in Paris at the Colonne concerts and at the Opera. It was during the first winter of her stay here that she went down to the steamship to greet Camille Saint Saens on his arrival. But he refused to speak to her on the ground that she was a "boche."

As a matter of fact, the soprano was always supposed here to be a Bohemian by birth, but she afterward claimed the nationality of her husband.

Taking Their Chances.

None of the so-called "pooling" arrangements under which the actors united to take their share of the profits of enterprises at the different theaters turned out in a way to encourage many

such experiments in the future. One musical show organized by a popular comedian continued less than two weeks, with some \$25 as the share of every participant. Even less successful was another commonwealth which produced a more ambitious dramatic performance. During the ten weeks this engagement lasted the players are said to have received in all less than \$25, not for every week, but for the whole ten.

But managers have not the slightest belief that the players will be any less exacting in their demands on account of these experiences. "Actors have short memories," one of them said the other day to the reporter for *The New York Herald*, "and they will soon forget in any return of their old prosperity that they were able to earn so little when they were playing under their own management. They will want just as much as ever, maybe a little bit more if they are able to get it. So the managers need not hope for any relief just because the actors when they handed together were able to get only a fractional share of their usual salaries."

What Worried Him.

"I've had the usual hard time getting along this season," a well known actor said to one of his colleagues the other day, "but, after all, I have been busy much of the time and I have had the worst that has befallen me has been the necessity of doing a great deal more work than usual for less money. But in all my struggles nothing has worried me more or discouraged me as much with the actor's calling as the knowledge that one man who never was on the stage before April has been receiving \$150 a week ever since he began. There is food for thought for every actor in that fact."

From a Wheel.

One of the most grotesque comedians seen in New York for a long time is Bernard Gorcey, who plays a henpecked husband in "Abie's Irish Rose." He was unknown to most of the audience on the first night, but that means nothing in these days, since plays and actors are so numerous that unknowns are inevitable. It soon became evident that he was a genuinely comic fellow, eccentric and exaggerated, but really laughable. He is, it seems, a member of a burlesque company and enjoys a high reputation as a comedian on one wheel or another.



MISS MARJORIE RAMBEAU in "THE GOLDFISH" MAXINE ELLIOTT.



MISS VIOLET HEMING in "THE PLAYER'S CLUB" REVIVAL OF "THE RIVALS" EMPIRE



MISS MADELINE SVISSON in "THE ROSE OF STAMBOUL" CENTURY



MISS EVELYN M. LAW in "THE NEW ZIEGFELD FOLLIES" NEW AMSTERDAM THEATRE.

Calendar of Events in the Playhouses

MONDAY.
NEW AMSTERDAM THEATRE—Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. will present the sixteenth edition of the Ziegfeld "Follies," with thirty-one principals and 100 typical beauties announced. The company includes: Willie Rogers, Gallagher and Shean, Miss Mary Eaton, Miss Gilda Gray, Florence O'Donoghue, Miss Martha Lorber, Miss Mary Lewis, Miss Evelyn Law, the Sixteen Tiller Girls, Andrew Tombes, Brandon Tynan and the Follies Quartet. The music is by Victor Herbert. Louis Hirsch and Fave Stampert, the lyrics by Gene Buck and the dialogue by Ring Lardner and Ralph Spence. Ballet numbers were directed by James Reynolds. Michel Folzine and dance diversions by John Tiller of London. The production was staged by Ned Wayburn, under the supervision of Mr. Ziegfeld.

CENTURY ROOF THEATRE—Ballets "Chauve Souri," brought from the Forty-ninth Street Theater by Morris Gest, will present a new bill. It will include "The Moscow Flashes," "The Evening Belle," "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," the only feature of the old show to be retained; "The King Orders the Drums to Be Beaten," "The Nightingale," "Quadrille Caballeros Sevillanos," "As in Front of Our Gates," "The Black Hussars," "Copenhagen Forcelaine," "The Three Kings of Cologne," "A Musical Snuff Box" and "Soldier Songs Before the Revolution."

EMPIRE THEATRE—Richard Brinsley Sheridan's comedy "The Rivals" will be revived by the Players' Club, with special scenery by Norman Bel-Graeff. The cast will include: Misses Violet Heming, Mary Shaw and Patricia Collinge, Francis Wilson, Robert Warwick, Tyrone Power, John Dusek, Fredrick Chase, James T. Powers and Henry E. Dixey.

GARRICK THEATRE—"Morn to Midnight," the play by Georg Kaiser, recently produced by the Theater Guild for its subscribers, will share this theater with "The Who Gets Sinner?" a public presentation on Monday and Tuesday nights, June 5, 6, 12 and 13. Frank Reicher, who directed, has the leading roles. The cast includes: Helen Westley, Edgar Steinhilber, Henry Travers, Philip Leigh, Eritia Lascelles and Miss Helen Sheridan.



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